

Memo

The Vietnamese Communists'
Will to Persist—Summary and Principal
Findings only

26 August 1966



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Memorandum

THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS WILL TO PERSIST

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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**An Analysis of the Vietnamese Communists'
Strengths, Capabilities, and Will to Persist in Their
Present Strategy in Vietnam.**

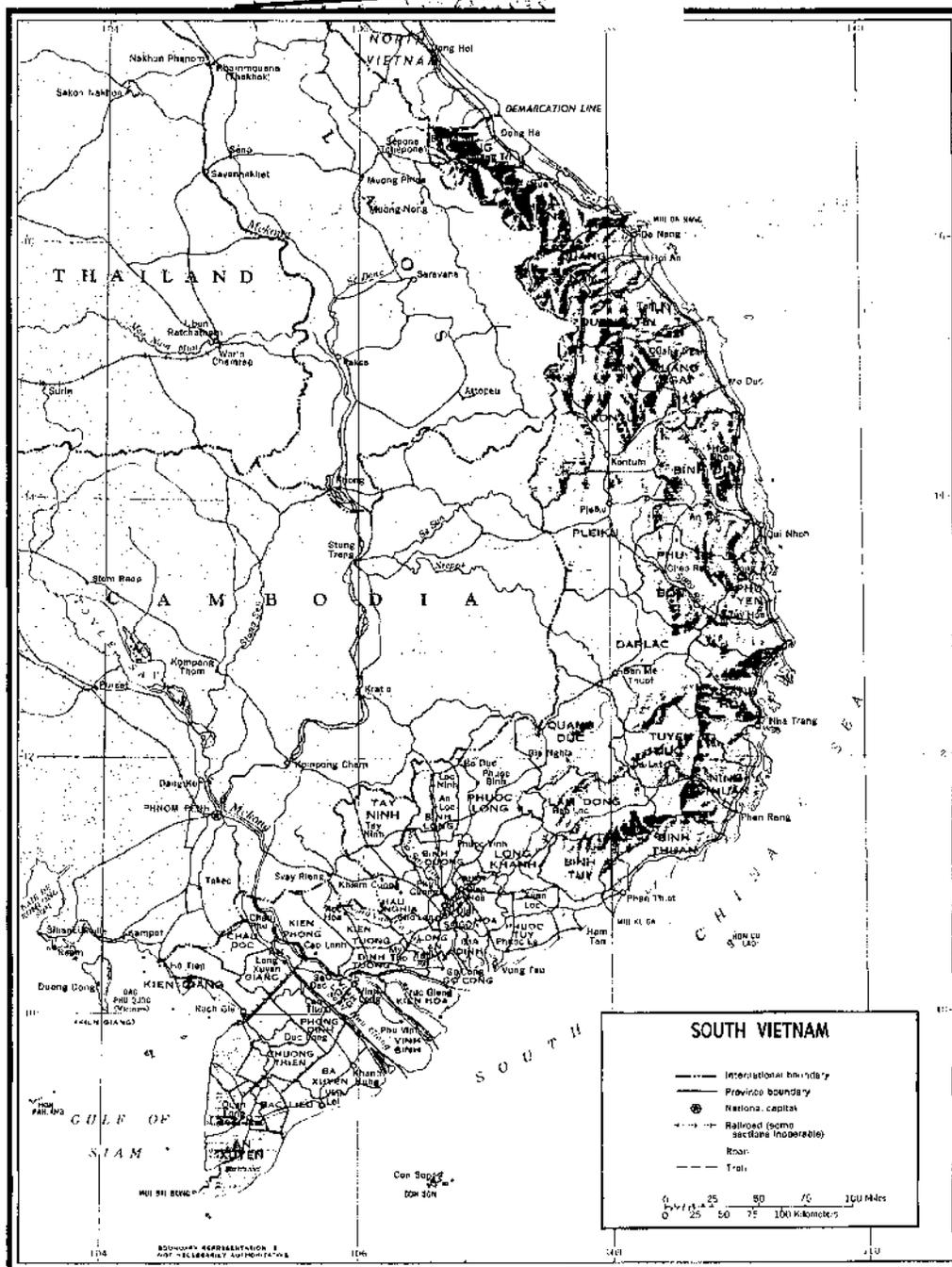
26 AUGUST 1966

This memorandum has been produced by the Directorate of Intelligence of the Central Intelligence Agency. It was jointly prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence, the Office of Research and Reports, the Office of National Estimates, and the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs in the Office of the Director of Central Intelligence.

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SUMMARY DISCUSSION

I. Introduction

1. For thirty-six years the Vietnamese Communist Party has struggled unrelentingly to acquire political control of Vietnam. During this period the Vietnamese Communists have often altered their strategy but never their objective, which remains today what it was when the Party was founded in 1930. Since 1959 their strategy has focused on a "War of National Liberation"—a blend of military and political action in South Vietnam designed to erode non-Communist political authority, to create an aura of Communist invincibility, and, eventually, destroy the South Vietnamese and U.S. will to resist.

2. The Lao Dong (i.e., Vietnamese Communist) Party now controls only the government of North Vietnam (the DRV), but it is national in scope, even though, for cover purposes, its members in the South operate under the name of the "People's Revolutionary Party." It instigated the present insurgency and has controlled it from its inception. In every significant respect the Communist movement throughout Vietnam is a single political entity whose strengths, capabilities and strategic intentions cannot be properly assessed unless it is analyzed as such.*

II. The Vietnamese Communists' Investment in the Struggle

3. During the early years of insurgency, the Vietnamese Communists fought at negligible cost to the DRV itself. The Viet Cong's political apparatus and its military forces were almost entirely composed of ethnic southerners. Even cadre and technicians infiltrated from North Vietnam were primarily Southerners who had gone north in the post-1954 regroupment. The insurgents

*Additional details on Vietnamese Communist organization are given in Annex III.

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lived off the land and obtained a large proportion of their supplies, including weapons and ammunition, from pre-1954 caches or capture from GVN forces. While the war ravaged the South, North Vietnam's own territory and economy were untouched. All of this, of course, has changed since 1961, and particularly since 1964. Hanoi's continued expansion of the insurgent effort has altered the complexion of the struggle and the ground rules under which it is waged.

4. This has required a drastic increase in the Communist investment. On a population base of around 18 million, North Vietnam now is supporting a military establishment of at least 400,000 men. By mid-1966 Hanoi was maintaining a force of at least 38,000 North Vietnamese troops to fight in the South. We estimate that this figure will rise to 60,000 by the end of 1966 and to 75,000 by mid-1967. Furthermore, to sustain its commitment in the struggle, North Vietnam has undergone partial mobilization and has had to divert at least 350,000 laborers to military or war-related tasks. North Vietnam's economy has been dislocated, its transportation system disrupted and the personal lives of its citizens adversely affected. To facilitate the dispatch of troops to South Vietnam and the external supplies they now require, Hanoi has had to develop and maintain an elaborate road and trail network through Laos in the face of continued interdiction and harassment.*

5. In South Vietnam, the Communists have developed an insurgent structure which includes an armed force estimated to be around 232,000 in addition to the 38,000 North Vietnamese troops already mentioned. This figure includes Viet Cong Main and Local Force troops, political cadre and combat support elements, and Southern Communist irregulars. Recently acquired documentary evidence, now being studied in detail,

*See Annex I for further details on North Vietnamese resources and capabilities.

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suggests that our holdings on the numerical strength of these irregulars (now carried at around 110,000) may require drastic upward revision.* To direct the execution of their insurgent campaign, the Communists have developed a party apparatus in the South estimated to number around 100,000 members, supported by a somewhat smaller youth auxiliary.** The Communists have also probably enrolled around 700,000 people in some component of their front organization, the "National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam." This total apparatus must be controlled, funded and supplied, although most of its requirements may be met from resources within South Vietnam.

6. Casualties the Communists have incurred and are incurring in ever increasing numbers represent another major element of human cost. We estimate that total Communist losses in South Vietnam alone--killed in action, captured, seriously wounded and deserted--ranged from 80,000 to 90,000 during 1965, counting both North and South Vietnamese.*** We estimate that during 1966 these losses may range from 105,000 to 120,000. We further estimate that the Communists may incur an additional 65,000 to 75,000 losses during the first six months of 1967, if current rates of combat are maintained and presently projected troop strengths are achieved.

*Details on Communist military forces in South Vietnam are given in Annex IV.

**Around 25,000 party members and somewhere between 15,000 to 20,000 members of the youth auxiliary are thought to be serving in the Communist armed forces. They would be included in the military strength totals already cited. If our estimate of the number of Communist irregulars proves to require upward revision, our estimate of the size of the party apparatus in the South and of its youth auxiliary will also require compensating adjustments. Details on the Communist organization in South Vietnam are given in Annex III.

***See Annex IV.

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II. Vietnamese Communist Capabilities for Persisting in
Their Present Strategy

7. The Northern Base: North Vietnam's role in the present insurgency is that of a command and control center, a source of manpower and a channel of supplies. The command and control function is something relatively invulnerable to physical pressure or external assault. Present Communist strategy is imposing some strains on North Vietnam's manpower reserves, but the strains are more qualitative than quantitative, and they are not likely to become insurmountable. The major pressures on manpower have resulted from the Hanoi regime's inability to manage manpower effectively, a relative scarcity of technicians and skilled laborers, and an excessive drain on the agricultural labor force. Over the next 12 months North Vietnam should be able to meet the manpower requirements generated by its internal needs, as well as those generated by projected further deployments of troops to the South, but these needs will be met at increasing costs in the economic, educational and social fields.

8. North Vietnam's own industrial plant makes only the most marginal contribution to Vietnamese Communist military strength. With minor exceptions (e.g., a modest small arms ammunition manufacturing capability) the Vietnamese Communists' military hardware is entirely supplied from external sources. Thus Hanoi's ability to provide continued materiel assistance to Communist forces in South Vietnam is largely dependent on North Vietnam's continued receipt of materiel support from China, the Soviet Union and East European Communist countries.* So far, the US aerial pressure program has not appreciably impeded North Vietnam's receipt of materiel support from abroad and its dispatch to South Vietnam. Despite the disruptions inflicted, the North Vietnamese transport and logistic system is now functioning more effectively after almost 18 months of bombing than it did when the

*This aspect of Vietnamese Communist capability is discussed in detail in Annex II.

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Rolling Thunder program started. Both internal transportation and infiltration traffic in 1966 were carried on at higher levels than in 1965. So long as the US air offensive remains at present levels, it is unlikely to diminish North Vietnam's continued ability to provide materiel support to the war in the South.

9. The Logistic Supply Network: Communist forces in South Vietnam are supplied with manpower and materiel primarily over the Communist-developed and maintained network of about 650 miles of roads and trails through southern Laos, and to a lesser extent by sea or through Cambodia. Allied harassment and interdiction certainly complicate the Communist supply system. The volume of traffic now moving through Laos, however, is so much below route capacity that it is unlikely that conventional attack can ever reduce the capacity of the Laos trail network below the level required to sustain Communist efforts in South Vietnam. Communist forces use Cambodia with almost complete immunity from allied countermeasures and with minimal interference from the Cambodian government. US and South Vietnamese naval patrols have probably curtailed Communist sea infiltration, but given the extent and nature of South Vietnam's coastline and the amount of small boat traffic in South Vietnamese waters, even this channel can never be completely closed.

10. The Southern Apparatus: The buildup of both VC/NVN and allied forces in South Vietnam and the rising tempo of combat are placing appreciable strains on the Viet Cong's ability to support the war. The distribution of needed supplies, particularly foodstuffs, within South Vietnam has become extremely difficult. This problem has been aggravated by the concentration of VC forces in food-deficient areas.* Furthermore, the manpower squeeze on Viet Cong resources is becoming serious. The Viet Cong have borne the brunt of Communist personnel losses in South Vietnam and have also had to compensate for losses of North Vietnamese personnel. We believe that the Viet Cong capability to recruit and train manpower is adequate to cover losses estimated

*See Annex V.

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for 1966 but will probably be inadequate to compensate for casualties and losses in 1967. During 1967 the North Vietnamese will have to assume most of the burden of expanding force levels, and an increasing role in replacing losses. These manpower requirements can almost certainly be met from North Vietnamese resources, but they will impose additional strains on North Vietnam's limited supply of skilled personnel and leadership cadre.

11. Apart from military manpower requirements, documentary evidence indicates that the Communist political apparatus in South Vietnam is already stretched thin and is not considered by the Communists themselves as fully adequate to their needs, particularly in urban areas. Cadre and leadership shortages will almost certainly increase in the months ahead. Although these shortages can be ameliorated by additional personnel dispatched from North Vietnam, the injection of an increasing number of northerners into the Southern apparatus will of itself produce some measure of discord within the Communist movement. Although the Viet Cong personnel needs are not likely to prevent the Vietnamese Communists from persisting in their present strategy, they almost certainly represent the weakest link in the Communists' capability chain.

12. Net Capability Assessment: The Communists' present strategy is costly in both human and economic terms and is taxing Communist resources in some areas, particularly within South Vietnam itself. Allied actions are complicating Communist efforts and raising the costs of their execution. However, neither internal resource shortages nor allied actions within present political parameters are likely to render the Vietnamese Communists physically incapable of persisting in their present strategy.

IV. The Vietnamese Communists' Probable Estimate of The Current State of the Struggle

13. The Communists' evaluation of the war and estimate of its future course will involve interlocked judgments on a variety of key factors, some of which are discussed below.

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14. The Communists' "Time Table": The Communists almost certainly do not have any fixed or rigid time table for victory. Their consideration of where they stand now, however, must in some measure be influenced by earlier estimates of where they had expected to be in mid-1966. Analysis of available documentary evidence suggests that in the 1959-1960 era, Hanoi's rulers thought it would take at least five years of all-out military and political action to gain control over South Vietnam. Until about 1962, the Communists appear to have been reasonably satisfied with the progress of their insurgent movement and to have felt that things were going more or less as planned. The counterinsurgency efforts of the Diem regime after 1962, however, and the expanded US advisory/support program confronted the Communists with unwelcome obstacles and led them to conclude that the conquest of South Vietnam would take longer than they had originally estimated.*

15. During 1964, as the Communists watched the continuing political disarray in Saigon, and devised tactics to cope with the increased U.S. assistance, Communist documents discussing the war grew progressively more optimistic. Communist optimism apparently reached its apex in the spring of 1965. They still carefully refrained from tying "victory" to a definite calendar date, but the Communists appear to have believed that they were then perhaps within a year or two of achieving a major part of their objectives. They had every reason to be optimistic in the spring of 1965; the GVN's strategic reserve was stretched to the breaking point, and the Communists were scoring tactical military successes with considerable cumulative political impact.

16. The massive infusion of US combat strength which began in mid-1965 probably saved the GVN from defeat and certainly disabused the Communists of any hopes of early victory. Their propaganda began to shift away from the theme of early victory to its present theme of inevitable victory. During 1966, Communist documents and public pronouncements have indicated that the Communists

*See Annex VIII.

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expect a long war. The Communists must be disappointed in comparing the present situation with that which existed in the spring of 1965. At least indirectly, they have acknowledged that the infusion of US and Allied combat forces has created new problems which must be overcome before victory can be won. Yet Communist realism is presently tinged more with defiance than pessimism; the Communists may be disappointed, but they do not yet seem to be discouraged.

17. The Lessons of the Franco - Viet Minh War: Present Vietnamese Communist strategy is appreciably influenced by the 1946-1954 struggle in which the Communist-controlled Viet Minh forced the French to withdraw from Vietnam. In Communist eyes, probably the most significant feature of this earlier successful campaign was the fact it was won without inflicting a strategic defeat on the French Military Forces.* During their nine-year struggle, the Communists successfully used military pressure as a political abrasive. They worked more on French will than on French strategic capabilities, and eventually succeeded in making the struggle a politically unsaleable commodity in metropolitan France. Communist strategy, in short, succeeded in creating a climate in which the government in Paris lost its will to fight even though the French Expeditionary Corps remained effective and largely intact as a military force. The Communists suffered horrendous casualties and went through periods of severe setback, but their persistence eventually paid off.

18. Soviet and Chinese Support** There is substantial evidence that the political positions of the Soviet Union and Communist China vis-a-vis the Vietnam struggle, and the amount of military assistance they both provide, are major influences on Vietnamese Communist policy. A cessation of bloc war aid would probably make

*The battle of Dienbienphu was a major tactical--rather than strategic--reverse for the French. It certainly did not destroy the French Expeditionary Corps as an effective military entity.

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it impossible for the Vietnamese Communists to sustain their struggle at its present level of intensity. Hanoi recognizes, however, that contemporary international Communist politics make such a cessation highly unlikely. Hanoi views bloc support as valuable in sustaining, and in some ways increasing, the military pressure which the Communists can bring to bear in South Vietnam and also sees it as a factor which at least partially inhibits and offsets the military pressure which allied forces can impose directly on North Vietnam. So long as bloc aid continues at least at its present levels, however, it will probably not be a critical factor in any basic determination the Vietnamese Communists might make on whether to continue the conflict. North Vietnamese assertions that, in the final analysis, they must rely mainly on their own resources to prosecute the revolution appear to reflect a genuine and deeply-held belief. Hanoi apparently believes that there are distinct limits to the amount of political and material support which it can count on from Peking and Moscow. Furthermore, the Vietnamese would not want to receive a degree of external (i.e., Chinese) aid that would jeopardize their control of the war, unless such aid were required to prevent the extinction of the Communist regime in North Vietnam.

19. Despite Peking's willingness to pressure Hanoi, the Chinese probably could not force the Vietnamese Communists to stay in the war if they decided of their own volition to end the fighting. The Vietnamese probably estimate that, in view of the limitations on the Chinese commitment, Peking would do little more than complain if the conflict were terminated short of an insurgent victory. The Chinese, in fact, seem to recognize this, for they have repeatedly left themselves in out by emphasizing that all decisions on the war are "strictly" up to the Vietnamese.

20. On the basis of Moscow's assistance so far, the Vietnamese probably judge that the Soviet commitment in the war is considerably more restrained than that of the Chinese. Hanoi is fully aware that Moscow, like Peking, is anxious to avoid steps which might lead to a direct military confrontation with the U.S. It is also doubtless clear to the Vietnamese that the Soviets

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would welcome an early end to the war. On balance, however, it is probable that Soviet backing has the effect of buttressing the Vietnamese Communist will to persist in the conflict. The Vietnamese probably judge that they can continue to count indefinitely on Moscow's assistance along present lines so long as the war continues in its present context. They probably believe, in fact, that the Soviets now are locked into a struggle in view of Moscow's desire to retain leadership of the Communist camp.

21. The Course of the Military Struggle in the South: Any objective assessment the Communists make of the course of the military struggle in South Vietnam will acknowledge that although they may not be losing the war at the present time, they are certainly not winning it. They have gone for months without a major tactical success. They are suffering severe and increasing casualties. They no longer enjoy a virtual monopoly of the initiative. Their base areas are no longer virtually sacrosanct; instead they are increasingly subject not only to aerial harassment but also to penetration by allied troops. Their plans are constantly being disrupted by allied spoiling actions, to which Communists must react either by fleeing or by fighting an unplanned engagement. The absolute strength of the forces with which the Communists must contend is steadily increasing. The time-honored guerrilla principle of ensuring numerical superiority at the point of attack has been undercut by the mobility of allied forces who cover ground by helicopter instead of by road. The Communists are far from being defeated, but they are faced with problems greater than any they have had to contend with before in this struggle. Furthermore, for the time being at least, Communist forces have lost the aura of invincibility which in days past (and in the Franco - Viet Minh war) was one of the Communists' most potent political assets.

22. The Price Being Paid in the North:* The air strikes against North Vietnam have created problems for

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the Communists, but in both military and economic terms, the damage inflicted so far has probably not exceeded what the Communists regard as acceptable levels. In most cases the reconstruction or repair of damaged facilities can be postponed or effectively achieved by cheap and temporary expedients. In both financial and material terms, the cost inflicted on North Vietnam by allied aerial attack is more than covered by the military and economic aid and technical assistance provided by other Communist countries. Although economic growth has stagnated and will probably deteriorate further in the coming year, air attacks conducted under present rules of engagement almost certainly cannot stop North Vietnamese activities essential to the support of the Communist war effort. In short, North Vietnam is taking punishment in its own territory, but a price it can afford and one it probably considers acceptable in light of the political objectives it hopes to achieve.

23. Communist Capabilities For Additional Force Commitment: In absolute numerical terms the Communists cannot hope to match present and projected allied force commitments. However, it is extremely unlikely that they feel any need to do so. An analysis of relative force levels shows that the apparent present free world superiority of six to one over VC/NVA Forces is largely eliminated when one compares the relative ratios of actual maneuver battalions--i.e., tactical combat troops available for commitment to offensive ground operations.* The present ratio of allied to Communist maneuver battalions is nearly one to one. If present estimates of allied and Communist force projections are accurate, by mid-1967 the Communists will have a slight advantage in this critical ratio. The Communists almost certainly feel that if they can maintain a maneuver battalion ratio in this range, they will be able to prolong the struggle indefinitely and wear down U.S. will to persist.

24. The Calculation of International Attitudes:**
There is considerable evidence that the Vietnamese

*Maneuver battalion ratios are analyzed in detail in Annex IV.

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Communists believe popular opposition throughout the Western world to U.S. policy in Vietnam can be an important political factor in the ultimate outcome of the struggle. Even though Hanoi appears to be concerned with the Vietnamese Communists' relatively limited ability to spur Western agitation against the allied policy by dint of their own propaganda apparatus, they obviously welcome the widespread belief that the struggle in South Vietnam has its roots in what is essentially a southern civil war and not, as Washington claims, in North Vietnamese aggression. Consideration of world popular opposition to U.S. policy would certainly enter into any eventual Vietnamese Communist decision on whether to revise present strategy but would almost certainly not be a decisive factor.

25. The Calculation of U.S. Domestic Attitudes: The Vietnamese Communists pay close attention to evidence of opposition to current U.S. policy arising within the United States itself. Despite some occasional signs of realism about the actual political force of such opposition, by and large the Vietnamese Communists almost certainly overestimate its present strength. Detailed knowledge of the realities of U.S. domestic politics is a fairly scarce commodity in Hanoi. Furthermore, not only do the Communists want to believe that there is strong American domestic opposition to current U.S. policy, but the course and eventual outcome of their previous struggle with the French almost certainly predisposes them to draw invalid parallels to French domestic opposition in the Indochina war and to look for signs of American domestic political pressures capable of forcing policy changes on Washington.

26. The Communists also appear to believe that the U.S. cannot match the continued input of North Vietnamese forces into the struggle (particularly in light of the maneuver battalion comparison outlined above) without going on a virtual wartime footing. They believe this would involve at least partial mobilization and create economic pressures which would drastically increase American opposition to the war, particularly as casualties continue. The Communists may hope that all of these pressures would be sufficiently unpopular within the U.S. to make the war politically unsaleable.

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27. Morale in North Vietnam:* The wearing effects of the war are causing some decline of civilian morale in North Vietnam, and there are indications the regime fears there may be a further deterioration. The decline, however, has not had any meaningful impact upon the determination of the regime to continue with the war or the policy options it may elect to achieve its objectives.

28. Communist Morale in South Vietnam:** Morale within Communist military forces and the political apparatus in South Vietnam has declined since mid-1965. It is conceivable that at some future point, the prospect of indefinite struggle if not defeat could break the morale of key elements of the Communist southern apparatus. Although Communist morale is obviously fraying badly in some parts of the insurgent structure, nowhere has it yet deteriorated to the point where the battle performance of Communist units is adversely affected. It has certainly not declined to a point presently sufficient to force any major revision in the basic Communist strategy.

29. Attitudes Among the People in Viet Cong Areas:*** There is a substantial body of evidence that morale and, consequently, support for the Communist cause, is dropping in Viet Cong - controlled areas of South Vietnam. The flow of refugees from such areas has increased drastically, and even if a desire for safety is the main motive for this exodus, the exodus itself attests to popular realization that no Viet Cong region is now immune from attack. Furthermore, there are indications that the refugee flow is caused not only by a quest for safety but also by a desire to escape increasingly onerous Communist levies of taxation, forced labor and

*See Annex I.

**The critical subject of morale in Communist Forces is the subject of Annex VI.

***This subject is examined in detail in Annex VII.

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conscription. Even though distaste for the Viet Cong is not necessarily positive support for Saigon, this shift in popular attitude could eventually cause the Communists serious problems.

30. The Course of South Vietnamese Political Development: Communist prospects obviously brighten perceptibly during periods of political turmoil within South Vietnam. Conversely, the development of a popularly rooted, viable non-Communist South Vietnamese state is the thing which, over the longer term, the Communists have the greatest reason to fear. Hanoi cannot ignore the fact that although the present Saigon regime is fragile, is far from effective or genuinely popular, and is beset with internal stress, it has nonetheless successfully weathered storms which several of its predecessors were unable to survive. The Communists must also recognize that the events of last spring made painfully manifest how weak they were in urban areas and how limited were their capabilities for capitalizing on political strife among contending non-Communist factions. While the present Saigon government would probably stand no chance of unaided survival in a contest with the Viet Cong, even if all North Vietnamese troops were withdrawn from South Vietnam, there are trends in South Vietnamese political life which are probably a source of disquiet to the Communists. Furthermore, they must recognize that the type of political activity represented by the Rural Development program, even if it is only moderately successful, strikes at the roots of their insurgency's indigenous strength and alters one of the necessary conditions for a successful "war of national liberation" strategy.

V. Probable Communist Near-Term Military and Political Strategy*

31. If they are objective, the Communists must acknowledge that during the past year their insurgent campaign has lost momentum in both the military and political fields. There are signs that the Communists have indeed recognized that developments of the past year have created problems which they must solve,

*Discussed in further detail in Annex XI.

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along with a situation quite different from that which they faced in fighting the French. Acknowledgment of the existence of these problems does seem to have provoked debates over strategy within the Communist hierarchy, but there is no present sign of any Communist intent to abandon or significantly alter the Communists' present strategy.

32. This strategy in the near term will probably revolve around two major efforts: (1) to keep intact, as far as possible, Main Force units in South Vietnam, and (2) to build up the Main Force strength, both in quantity and in quality, in order to be able to counter allied power when US forces in Vietnam have built up to the level of 400,000 expected by the Communists at the end of 1966. The North Vietnamese leaders probably believe that if they can go into 1967 with an ability to field a Main Force strength of about 125,000, as compared to a US strength of 400,000, they will be able to continue the war. Hanoi probably estimates that a four-to-one absolute military manpower advantage in favor of the US will not be enough for the US to defeat the insurgents; even under these conditions the Communists will be able to match allied forces in maneuver battalions.

33. Analysis of Communist materials indicates that the military strategy of the Communists during the coming months will be largely a continuation of their operational concepts of 1964 and 1965. They will concentrate mainly on opening simultaneous campaigns in the highlands and the area northwest of Saigon, combined with occasional other major actions in the northern coastal provinces. The latter may accelerate as the northeast monsoons begin. Their primary aim will be to stretch the allied forces as thin as possible and inflict as many casualties as possible on allied units. The primary target of the Communists during the coming months will probably be U.S. forces, rather than South Vietnamese. The Communists will continue their attempts to reduce American military mobility and striking power by harassment and by concentration of Communist forces around U.S. base areas to tie down as many Americans as possible in static defense tasks.

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34. To keep U.S. and other allied forces from hitting and hurting large Communist units, the insurgents will probably stick primarily to ambushes, hit-and-run strikes, and guerrilla harassment in situations where they believe the odds of success are decidedly in their favor. Should favorable conditions arise, however, they will almost certainly attempt to conduct operations in regimental strength and greater. The Communists will be working in the meantime on efforts at better concealment of the locations of their main force units in order to counter the improved allied intelligence on the tactical disposition of Communist elements. When large-scale battles occur, the Communists may attempt to devolve them into a series of skirmishes in which Communist ambush and hit-and-run tactics can be used more effectively against small-sized elements of the allied attacking force.

35. On the political side, Communist strategy and goals for the remainder of 1966 and early 1967 will have to take account of recent insurgent setbacks. Captured documents indicate that the Communists will give priority to strengthening and improving their political apparatus, notably by trying to improve the quality of political cadres down to the village level, and by continued emphasis on the recruitment of party members and sympathizers in both rural and urban areas. They will probably continue to concentrate their subversive efforts on the South Vietnamese army and civil service. Laboring class elements may also attract increasing attention in the hope that economic discontent with the inflation spiral in South Vietnam can be exploited to the insurgents' advantage.

36. There is an increasing number of reports that the Communists will make serious efforts to disrupt the constitutional assembly election on 11 September. It is doubtful at this time that the Communists themselves have any significant number of followers among the candidates who have filed, though many of the candidates are relative unknowns even to local government officials. Communist propaganda statements have vigorously denounced the coming election as a farce and a trick. The Communists may feel impelled to take an active role through covert campaigning against candidates, or through terrorism and other direct sabotage efforts.

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VI. Key Trends and Factors

37. In addition to their own logistic, manpower and morale problems, future Communist strategic decisions will probably be primarily influenced by developments in three areas: the course of South Vietnam's political evolution, the course of the military struggle in South Vietnam, and the attitude of the United States--or, more accurately, their estimate of American will and the US Government's political ability to persevere. The Communists, for example, will be paying particular attention to the outcome of the September elections in Vietnam and their resultant effect on South Vietnamese political stability and strength; Communist success or failure in matching allied maneuver battalion strength and achieving at least some tactical successes; and the outcome and import--or what the Communists believe to be the import--of next November's elections in the United States.

VII. The Day of Decision

38. The timing of any Vietnamese Communist decision on altering basic strategy--and the nature of such a decision--will be greatly affected by a variety of considerations including those outlined in the preceding paragraph. We estimate that none of the pressures upon the Communists which we can now identify is severe enough to force a major change in Communist strategy over the next eight to nine months. The Communists would be even less inclined to alter their strategy if they should find political and military developments during this period running in their favor--for example, serious political deterioration in South Vietnam, a series of major Viet Cong military successes, or what they construe as a significant rise of anti-war sentiment in the United States. If on the other hand pressures on them are maintained, and the course of events gives them no grounds for encouragement, they will probably feel compelled by late spring of 1967 to take stock and consider a change in their basic strategy.

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VIII. Alternate Communist Strategic Options

39. Should the Vietnamese Communists decide at this point that continuation of their insurgency along current lines would not be profitable, they would have three basic policy options. They could: (1) convert the struggle into a major war by inviting massive Chinese Communist military intervention; (2) relax Communist pressure and withdraw some North Vietnamese troops, in the hope that the appearance of tranquility would eventually impel the US to disengage the better part of its forces without any formal commitments from the Communists in return; or (3) enter into some form of negotiations.

40. We believe Option (1) is the option the Vietnamese Communists would consider least in their long-term interests. Option (2), despite some advantages, would entail major problems for the Communists. It carries no guarantee that the U.S. would in fact disengage, and puts the Communists in a position of bidding by successive increments to bring this about. It would engender serious morale problems for the Communists during a protracted stand-down without simultaneous U.S. response. It would be hard to explain as anything but acknowledgement of a serious reverse for long-range Communist objectives.

41. In our view, the Vietnamese Communists would be most likely to try some variant of Option (3)-- negotiation. They would hope initially to achieve a reduction of allied offensive pressure, including a suspension of bombing in the North.* They would probably work to keep the talks going in order to prolong such a respite. During the course of the negotiations, they would probably determine whether they would seriously explore the possibilities of an acceptable political solution, or examine the alternative courses still open to them.

*Communist behavior in periods of negotiation is examined in Annex XIII.

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PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

1. So long as the U.S. air offensive remains at present levels, it is unlikely to diminish North Vietnam's continued ability to provide materiel support to the war in the South. North Vietnam is taking punishment on its own territory, but at a price it can afford and one it probably considers acceptable in light of the political objectives it hopes to achieve.

2. The Viet Cong have borne the brunt of Communist personnel losses in South Vietnam and have also had to compensate for losses of North Vietnamese personnel. We believe that the Viet Cong capability to recruit and train manpower is adequate to cover losses estimated for 1966 but will probably be inadequate to compensate for casualties and losses in 1967. During 1967 the North Vietnamese will have to assume most of the burden of expanding force levels, and an increasing role in replacing losses. These manpower requirements can almost certainly be met from North Vietnamese resources, but they will impose additional strains on North Vietnam's limited supply of skilled personnel and leadership cadre.

3. The Communists' present strategy is costly in both human and economic terms and is taxing Communist resources in some areas, particularly within South Vietnam itself. Allied actions are complicating Communist efforts and raising the costs of their execution. However, neither internal resource shortages nor allied actions within present political parameters are likely to render the Vietnamese Communists physically incapable of persisting in their present strategy.

4. In absolute numerical terms the Communists cannot hope to match present and projected Allied force commitments. However, if present estimates of Allied and Communist force projections are accurate, by mid-1967 the Communists will have a slight advantage in maneuver battalions--i.e., tactical combat troops available for commitment to offensive ground operations.

5. Nevertheless, if they are objective, the Communists must acknowledge that during the past year their

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insurgent campaign has lost momentum in both the military and political fields. Although they may not be losing the war at the present time, they are certainly not winning it. The Communists are far from being defeated; but they are faced with problems greater than any they have had to contend with before in this struggle. Furthermore, Communist forces have at least temporarily lost the aura of invincibility which was one of their most potent political assets.

6. Morale within Communist military forces and the political apparatus in South Vietnam has declined since mid-1965 but not to a point presently sufficient to force any major revision in basic Communist strategy.

7. The Communists must be disappointed in comparing the present situation with that which existed in the spring of 1965. At least indirectly, they have acknowledged that the infusion of U.S. and Allied combat forces has created new problems which must be overcome before victory can be won. Yet Communist realism is presently tinged more with defiance than pessimism; the Communists may be disappointed, but they do not yet seem to be discouraged.

8. Consideration of world popular opposition to U.S. policy would certainly enter into any eventual Vietnamese Communist decision on whether to revise present strategy but would most certainly not be a decisive factor.

9. The Vietnamese Communists pay close attention to evidence of opposition to current U.S. policy arising within the United States itself. The outcome of their previous struggle with the French almost certainly predisposes them to draw invalid parallels to French domestic opposition in the Indochina war and to look for signs of American domestic political pressures capable of forcing policy changes on Washington.

10. The timing of any Vietnamese Communist decision on altering basic strategy--and the nature of such a decision--will be greatly affected by a variety of considerations, including those outlined in this paper. We estimate that none of the pressures upon the Communists

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which we can now identify is severe enough to force a major change in Communist strategy over the next eight to nine months. The Communists would be even less inclined to alter their strategy if they should find political and military developments during this period running in their favor--for example, serious political deterioration in South Vietnam, a series of major Viet Cong military successes, or what they construe as a significant rise of anti-war sentiment in the United States. If on the other hand pressures on them are maintained and the course of events gives them no grounds for encouragement, by late spring of 1967 they will probably feel compelled to take stock and consider a change in their basic strategy.

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